

DEVELOPMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The author describes the principal standards established, without reference to specific laws, and says that the Federal Government, supported by the legislature has laid the foundations for a very high standard of labor protection. This has resulted in a marked reduction of accidents at work, and allows to expect full control of the situation in this area in the future.

By 1977, Brazil had reached the level of the world's great nations with 980 posts of labor physician and another 980 of labor safety engineer created by the Labor Ministry in order to inspect companies throughout the country, and with numerous technicians trained to function in private enterprises, as called for by Recommendation No. 112/59 of the International Labor Organization.

The history of the legal protection of workers in Brazil can be divided into four stages or cycles:

- 1st Cycle – up to 1923 (hiatus of 7 years),
- 2nd Cycle – from 1930 to 1945 (hiatus of 8 years),
- 3rd Cycle – from 1953 to 1967 (hiatus of 5 years),
- 4th Cycle – beginning 1972.

Strictly speaking, the 1st Cycle began in this century with indemnification laws predominating. In 1912 the Government adopted law on indemnification for railway accidents, in 1919 the first law covering labor accidents, and in 1923 the first social security law. This was followed by a hiatus of seven years.

The 2nd Cycle brought the following development: in 1930, creation of the Labor Ministry, in 1932, creation of Regional Inspection Offices of the Labor Ministry, and in 1936, creation of the Minimum Wage Commissions to deal especially with wages of minors and bonuses for unhealthful working conditions. In 1939, the first legal standards for unhealthful working conditions were instituted. Regulations regarding minimum wages became applicable in 1940, while in 1942 a normative agency for protection of workers (Division of Labor Hygiene and Safety, Labor Ministry) was set up, opening opportunities for persons above the age of 45. All labor legislation was consolidated in a single document in 1943, and one year later the posts of labor physician and labor safety engineer in the Labor Ministry were created. The same year an important law

covering labor accidents came into force. This was a fertile period, which also brought further social security legislation. Again, these activities were followed by a hiatus of eight years.

The 3rd Cycle covering the period 1953–1967, is characterized by the appearance of isolated measures. Regulations on Internal Accident Prevention Commissions (set up back in 1944) were adopted in 1953. These Commissions were to be installed in enterprises with more than 100 employees. Legal regulations regarding dangerous working conditions (inflammables) were introduced in 1955 and in 1962 (second law on unhealthful working conditions). A major change was the recognition of noise as a noxious factor. Regulations were also adopted in the sphere of civil construction. Transformation and expansion of the normative agency took place in 1965, i.e. in the same year when the third law on unhealthful working condition came into force.

"Fundacentro", which is responsible for supervising activities in the sphere of labor safety and medicine, in co-ordination with the Labor Ministry, was founded in 1966. The import of certain protective equipment became exempted from all customs duties for the next ten years. After 1967, when state monopoly of workmen's compensation insurance became effective, there was no activity in occupational health for a period of five years.

Intensive participation of the Federal Government in labor protection policy characterizes the 4th Cycle. Under the National Program for the Valorization of the Worker (PNVT) a service of Labor Safety and Medicine was set up and the posts were created of labor physician, labor safety engineer, labor nurse, supervisor of labor safety and labor nursing assistant, in enterprises with more than 100 employees. These measures are in accordance with the International Labor Organization's Recommendation No. 112/59.

Occupational health services in private enterprises were introduced in 1972. Gradually, tax incentives were granted to enterprises which provided meals for their employees. This is regarded as one of the most important social measures of the 30 years. The Internal Accident Prevention Commissions (CIPA) were reorganized with the requirement that they be installed in enterprises with more than 50 employees. The fourth law on unhealthful working conditions, with quantification of noxious agents based on TLV tables came into force in 1978. The basic labor protection legislation was reformulated once again and many innovations were introduced, including closure or prohibition of sectors involving direct risk, charging of fines, prevention of ergonomic pathology, minimum level of illumination (unhealthful conditions), and regulations regarding vibrations and non-ionizing radiations.

The Federal Government, with the support of the legislature has laid the foundations for a very high standard of labor protection. This has resulted in a marked reduction of accidents at work and allows to expect full control of the situation in this area in the future.

By 1977 Brazil had reached the level of the world's great nations concerning experts in occupational health (Table 1). Thus 980 posts of labor physician and

TABLE 1
Experts trained in occupational health and safety. Data from "Fundacentro" (National Foundation on Occupational Health and Safety).

Profession	1973-74	1975	1976	1977-78	Total
Labor physician	2 643	4 306	1 723	1 196	9 868
Labor nurse	38	282	162	138	620
Labor nursing assistant	1 215	1 689	1 316	1 012	5 232
Labor safety engineer	1 748	5 215	1 613	1 702	10 278
Supervisor of labor safety	7 779	14 483	2 032	1 695	25 989
Total	13 423	25 975	6 846	5 743	51 987

another 980 of labor safety engineer were created by the Labor Ministry in order to inspect companies throughout the country and numerous technicians were trained to function in private enterprises.